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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": (a) The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Statement submitted by Bahá'í International Community, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and the European Union of Women, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

1. The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action underlined the indispensability of the contribution of men and boys to achieving gender equality. Recent years have witnessed considerable advances in women's attainment of political and civil rights, but the implementation of full gender equality requires a profound shift in individual values, outlook and conduct, which will ultimately transform the underlying ethos of social institutions, making them more welcoming to women.

2. The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith offer a model of gender equality based on the concept of partnership between the sexes and the active support of men and boys for the achievement of equality. Three basic elements underpin the Bahá'í approach, as set out below.

3. Bahá'ís are committed to an evolutionary social transformation of fundamental values, even in regions of the world where cultural traditions impose obstacles to women's development. Enduring change comes through cooperative activity of men and women rather than through confrontation. Hence, we call upon all members of society to encourage and support women to develop their full potential and to strive for their equality and human rights, and we recognize that much more can be accomplished in the long run if men and women work together. Within the family, therefore, boys and girls alike are taught respect for all females and within the Bahá'í community, programmes are conducted to educate men and boys concerning the status of women and a variety of practical measures are instituted to foster their involvement in promoting gender equality as a shared community goal.

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4. The full development of men and boys is inextricably linked to the advancement of women. A society characterized by gender equality serves the interests of both sexes. It enables men and women to develop in a more balanced and multifaceted way and to discard the rigid role stereotypes so crucial to shifting family dynamics and to accord women full access to the world of work. It also enables both sexes to recognize each others' needs, building an awareness vital to the resolution of issues associated with women's health, and enables the replacement of unequal relationships and tendencies towards domination and aggression with genuine partnerships between the sexes, characterized by collaboration and the sharing of resources and decision-making.

5. Bahá'ís view the advancement of women as an ongoing organic process aligned with the forces of social transformation and the movement towards the recognition of the oneness of humanity. We recommend making a start, however modest, by educating boys from the earliest stage of their social development in initiatives along the lines of those outlined above, and by engaging the support of men in this process, in order to foster a more conscious awareness that the interests of men and boys are linked to those of women.

6. In the light of the experience and contribution of the Bahá'í community in 182 countries towards the implementation of those principles, Bahá'ís remain optimistic about the achievement of gender equality and the progressive involvement of men and boys in achieving that goal.